GROUPS IN CARTON PIERRE, IN LYCEUM THEATRE.

From the scale of the view we gave of the Lyceum Theatre in the Strand, the groups of boys and foliage, bearing the lights, were scarcely represented so clearly as they deserve. In our present number, therefore, we add drawings of them on a larger scale. The upper engraving shows the figures which are seated on the entablature; and the lower represents one of the groups encrusting the main columns, on a level with the front of the first tier of boxes above the dress circle. As previously stated, these are formed of *carton pierre*, and painted and varnished to appear like china, etch gilt.

We have already spoken of the artistical skill displayed by Messrs. Jackson in the whole of the applied ornaments, modelled and put up here; an after-examination of other works executed by them, has strengthened our good opinion.

WHAT IS HIGH ART?

DECORATIVE-ART SOCIETY.

At a meeting held on the 13th ult. (the opening of the present session), the first portion of a paper "On Art; its distinctions and purposes relatively considered," by Mr. Dwyer, was read. The leading questions arising from the subject, as set forth in the members' circular, were, What is high art? historical art? fine art? &c. Under what conditions do these become identical? and what is the relative value of each for the purposes of decorative art?

Mr. Dwyer introduced the subject by remarking, that amidst the multifarious writings extant upon art, the ambitious tendencies of this or that author in jealously upholding the dignity of a particular class of artists, or in vaunting forth the advantages arising from a given system of practice, would appear to have been the main considerations. For the most part, however, we should find that the study of nature is held to be the starting-point from which we are to be led away into a complexity of technicalities and metaphysical reasonings. As in writings, so it would be found in works. The architect, sculptor, painter, and poet, each attempts a mysterious grappling of mind with matter of fact, occasionally developing a high degree of intellectuality with much that is either unmeaning or not easily understood. Then, he observed, there is the continually varying misapplication of technical terms in art, arising from an absence of principle in giving fixed names to definite things, which renders it a matter of difficulty to understand the proper limits and distinctions which exist between even such terms as high art, historical art, fine art, &c. He had sought for precise definitions from living artists of good repute and long standing, but obtained none; he had heard much of reasoning, in small circles as it were, which convinced him that a more general and comprehensive knowledge of art in its various phases would be useful, indeed, among its professors. The ordinary criticisms of the day upon art were to him vague and meaningless, and would generally, if divested of doubtful technicalities and expressed in plain English words, expose their flimsy construction. In tracing the progress of art, the reader felt that it had been strangely handled, not alone from the restless ambition of some of its votaries and professors, but still more so by the wanderings of others after the indefinite. Princes and popes have at certain periods entertained a deference for its works, which at other times is wholly lost to observation; but he considered that the attention at present directed towards art, throughout Europe, would probably promote an unprecedented Progress. The spirit of popular agitation, which the Corn Laws now no longer engross, might attach its epidemic influence and searching powers to the arts in our country, with advantage to all. Nevertheless, he held art in itself to be capable only of slow progress, simply because that must arise solely from a succession of improvements in imitative skill. A parallel to the present demand for variety of style and character had not, he said, existed in any previous period. In painting, sculpture, and architecture, we may learn to discover distinctive features marking a period, and most clearly shewing the development of progression. Mr. Dwyer sustained this argument, by contending that the sameness of treatment in the works of most artists testifies to the tenacity with which copying or imitation clings to all, and that therefore it is essential to reflect and know, how far the different schools of art have relation to each other in respect of imitation,—how much an artist has been indebted to previous examples, —before we can adjudge to him a qualitative rank. The reader then enumerated celebrated works by Greeks, Romans, Italians, Venetians, French, Flemish, and Dutch, which, he maintained, were in harmony with the tastes and moral dispositions of the respective nations at the time they were produced, and also that art is in a great measure localized—dependent on certain rules, as developed by existing specimens, and by the position these held in the public estimation,—that it is essentially a thing of time, place, and circumstance. By judging of works of art upon a particular consideration of beauty, and by admitting one *class* of production as superior in rank to another, without reference to a comprehensive view of art generally, a great injustice had, he maintained, been engrafted on our received opinions upon art. There was, it was said, a strong resemblance in the results, to the choice of an inexperienced person, between one watch, having inferior mechanism in a gold case, and another containing good works, in a silver one—when the gold case was selected. It was unfortunate for art that its votaries had been too frequently influenced by a gold case. Distinctive ranks in the departments of art, the reader contended, were a great evil, and to equalize them would be a great good achieved. Until the difficulties attendant upon the operations of art are understood, and unjust prejudices removed—until painters in oil, water, encaustic, and fresco, cease to disparage each other's work, and to exaggerate the importance of their own, until all aristocracy in practice of art shall be dissipated, and art, in humble garb of plaster and clay, be looked upon as kindlily as if in marble, until some new energy shall have swept away these prejudices, as unreasonable as unjust, and a combination of artists in one emulative course of comprehensive inquiry and dispassionate reasoning, shall contribute to that one great purpose called art—we must not, it was contended, look for a positive and marked progressive feature to be developed in our times. It was then explained, that art being essentially based upon ideality, with an accurate presentment of effects in form and colour, after nature, is constituted and regulated by certain principles in harmony with the prevailing taste, education, or fashion, so as to excite pleasing emotions; and that it is therefore necessary to specially advance education and train the mind, before the really beautiful in art can be properly appreciated, or the genius evinced receive a just and fair criticism. Several instances were referred to, shewing the power of art in expressing clearly and intelligibly to all whatever sentiment it is intended to impart,—as the "Laughing Faun" and the "Dying Gladiator," in sculpture; or the "Creation of Adam," by Michelangelo; the

GROUPS IN LYCEUM THEATRE,

MODELLED BY MR. W. JACKSON.

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